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INFO RUCNMGH/MAGHREB COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L TUNIS 000849

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/19/2019
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [PGOV](#) [TS](#)
SUBJECT: BEN ALI RECEIVES AMBASSADOR'S CREDENTIALS,
CAUTIONS AGAINST "INTERFERENCE"

Classified by Ambassador Gordon Gray for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C/NF) Summary: The Ambassador presented his credentials to President Ben Ali in a group ceremony on November 19. In his remarks, Ben Ali offered warm words of welcome and friendship, but insisted that last month's elections had been fair and transparent, and politely warned foreign countries from "interfering in Tunisia's affairs." To our medically untrained eyes, Ben Ali appeared calm, vigorous, and healthy. End summary.

¶2. (U) The Ambassador presented his letters of credence to President Ben Ali on the morning of November 19. The highly formalized ceremony at Carthage Palace, witnessed by Foreign Minister Abdallah and senior Foreign Ministry officials, also included new ambassadors from Canada, the Czech Republic, France, Greece, Hungary, Ireland (resident in Madrid), Japan, Jordan, Kuwait, the Netherlands, and Slovakia (resident in Tripoli).

¶3. (SBU) In a ten minute address to the assembled ambassadors, Ben Ali pledged cooperation and friendship, stressed Tunisia's multiple identities as an Arab, Mediterranean, and African nation; and vowed to continue to focus on economic and human development. Ben Ali underlined his view that last month's presidential and legislative elections "took place under the auspices of public order, transparency, honest competition and respect for the law, before the eyes of Tunisian and foreign observers who monitored the electoral process at all stages and all levels and testified to their credibility and success."

¶4. (SBU) Apparently in response to recent expressions of concern or reservations about the elections and human rights in Tunisia from Washington and Paris, most recently voiced by Belgium's Foreign Minister, Ben Ali's remarks also contained a pointed objection to foreign interference: "As much as Tunisia respects the positions and choices of its brothers and friends and shuns interfering in their affairs, it asks those brothers and friends to respect its positions and choices and to desist in their turn from interfering in its affairs."

¶5. (C/NF) Comment: This is the second time this month the Ambassador has seen Ben Ali at close range; The first was at a reception commemorating the November 7 anniversary of Ben Ali's seizure of power. In both cases, Ben Ali, from up close, appeared calm, vigorous, with a normal complexion and generally healthy. Though we are certainly not doctors, nothing we saw struck us as possibly indicative of a health problem. End comment.

GRAY